

Clean from the inside out

Regular cleaning of a hospital's ventilation system is essential for maintaining a safe and comfortable environment and can reduce the risk of healthcare-associated infections (HCAs) explains Darren Ling, a director of System Hygienics

Surface dust and dirt is easy to clean as it is visible to the eye, but what about the dirt you can't see? Ventilation systems, for example, provide the perfect breeding ground for potentially harmful bacteria. Hospitals are duty bound by legislation to prevent the spread of infections in line with the requirements laid down in the Health Technical Memorandum 03-01. This focuses on the operational management and performance verification of specialised ventilation systems in healthcare premises, advising on best practice and maintenance procedures. The Department of Health clearly states: "Increased health risks to patients will occur if ventilation systems do not achieve and maintain the required standards. The link between surgical site infection and theatre air quality has been well established."

To control the spread of infections, internal ductwork surfaces must be cleaned regularly to avoid the inevitable build-up of organic compounds, such as dust and dirt. If dust and dirt is left, harmful micro-organisms can form in the ventilation ductwork and can easily become airborne. In a hospital environment, airborne contaminants can pose a significant threat to the welfare of patients, increasing the risks of life-threatening viruses such as MRSA and Clostridium Difficile.

But it's not just ventilation in working hospitals that needs to be kept clean. It has long been a myth that protection of ductwork on a construction site is sufficient for maintaining the internal cleanliness of the system in a new hospital. This is not true.

The Heating and Ventilating Contractors' Association's TR/19 Guide

to Good Practice, Internal Cleanliness of Ventilation Systems, stipulates: "Protection of ductwork on a construction site will not guarantee internal cleanliness of ductwork. Where specific verifiable levels of internal cleanliness are required it will be the responsibility of the designer to specify the inclusion of a specialist cleaning contractor on the outset of a contract to internally clean newly installed ductwork just prior to commissioning work commencing."

Hospital takes a fresh breath of air

System Hygienics has more than 15 years experience of cleaning ductwork systems for NHS and private hospitals and has just completed a major pre-commission clean at the site of the new Peterborough City Hospital working with contractor Mercury Engineering. This £335 million new hospital, built by Brookfield Construction (UK) Ltd, will replace the current Peterborough District Hospital, Edith Cavell Hospital and Peterborough Maternity Unit. The City Hospital will offer services for patients not previously available in Peterborough such as radiotherapy. This will mean that some cancer patients will no longer have to make the journey to Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge for treatment.

Mike Sharples, Project Director from Brookfield Construction (UK) Ltd, said: "This project is one of the biggest healthcare initiatives in the UK and the largest building project in Peterborough for over 800 years. The hospital is a landmark building and demonstrates a good working relationship between the client, the Trusts, the design team and contractors like System Hygienics."

The hospital's ventilation ductwork was cleaned using System Hygienics' remote cleaning method – the Jetvent system. The system uses compressed air and a powerful filtered vacuum to achieve a fast and effective clean to the HVCA's TR/19 standards. The Jetvent requires minimal access to ductwork as it can reach up to 50 metres from one point. System Hygienics provided detailed reports with before and after photos of all aspects of the ventilation systems along with a certificate of cleanliness and third party analysed HVCA TR/19 Vacuum Tests to verify the high level of cleanliness achieved.

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